

## Chapter 8 Communications

AP4 centers are likely to experience high turnover as partners, investigators, and students join and leave the center. To ensure that everyone involved in the center is familiar with center values and mission, the director must develop a solid communications plan that includes semiannual meetings, formal reports, and mechanisms to ensure that everyone involved in the center is aware of center activities. Some of the information in this chapter may seem like common sense. The information is included, however, because many projects have faltered and good ideas rejected because of poor communication.

### **The Semiannual Meeting**

The semiannual meeting (see master communications calendar, Appendix 8-1) gives AP4 center investigators an opportunity to meet with center partners. As discussed in Chapter 7, a primary purpose of the semiannual meeting is for investigators to present ongoing and proposed AP4 center research to steering committee members, who then determine whether to continue or halt current projects and start new ones. The meetings also give partners a status report on center operations and an opportunity to provide feedback on current and proposed activities.

The entire meeting should be regarded as an opportunity for exchanging ideas. Because formal presentations do not necessarily stimulate conversation, the meeting should include plenty of open time.

### ***Preparing for the Meeting***

<b>Figure 8-1: Timeline for semiannual meeting preparation</b>	
8–10 weeks before meeting	Center director sends out formal invitation letters.
6 weeks before meeting	Center director finalizes presenters and schedules. Presenters provide center director with final versions of hard-copy materials (e.g., 1-page executive summaries of project presentations).
4 weeks before meeting	Center director sends out: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Final meeting agenda.</li> <li>• Information on transportation and lodging.</li> <li>• Proposals for new research projects.</li> <li>• Executive summaries of ongoing projects.</li> </ul>
1 day before meeting	Investigators submit posters.

The center director should send out formal letters of invitation to AP4 center partners, institution officials, investigators, students, and guests 8–10 weeks before the meeting. The letter should explain the purpose of the meeting; specify meeting date(s), location, and time; and include a draft agenda and registration form (for confirmation of intent to participate). Approximately 1 month before the meeting, the director should send out the final meeting agenda, information on lodging and transportation options, an update, and any materials that participants need to read

before the meeting. At this time, all steering committee members should receive copies of proposals for new center research projects and brief executive summaries of ongoing research.

Details about planning and organizing a meeting are provided in Chapter 3 of this handbook. A summary of the steps involved is provided here:

- Identify possible locations for the meeting at the institution or elsewhere (e.g., a hotel).
- Determine institution's policies on reimbursing travel expenses for out-of-town participants.
- Arrange for meals and snacks, confirm details with speakers (and copy any handouts they plan to distribute), order name tags, and reserve any needed audiovisual equipment.
- Make arrangements to record the meeting proceedings, either by audiotaping the discussions and having the tapes transcribed, or by assigning someone to take notes on the discussion and prepare a meeting summary.

### ***Conducting the Meeting***

The semiannual meeting provides an opportunity for steering committee members to offer formal feedback on the center's ongoing and proposed research projects, as well as informal feedback on new policies, research directions, and funding initiatives. The meeting should focus on answering questions and exploring alternatives.

The quality of the meeting is a function of interactions during the meeting. To ensure a high-quality meeting, the center director should follow the agenda distributed prior to the meeting. Participants will arrive at the meeting with expectations concerning which sessions they will attend, so the agenda should be altered as little as possible once it has been distributed. If changes to the agenda are extensive, they can cause so much confusion that the meeting will not be productive.

To keep audience interest high, consider different modes of presentation and ways to ensure feedback, such as prepared questions and discussion groups, even during standard lecture-style presentations. To ensure that the meeting presentations are as polished as possible, bring together all presenters approximately 2 weeks prior to the meeting for a practice session. Ideally, all presentations will be videotaped so speakers can see how their presentations will look to the audience. But even without videotaping, those attending the practice session can provide helpful feedback to the presenters.

To chair the meeting effectively, the center director should be aware of tasks that must be accomplished and the human relations involved. The most basic tasks are to start all sessions on time and keep to the agenda. The director should facilitate participation by making a clear initial statement regarding meeting goals and emphasize that all contributions are valuable. At that time, the director should also query participants to clarify ideas or concerns.

<b>Figure 8-2: Suggested agenda for the semiannual meeting</b>		
<b>Day 1</b>		<b>Session leader:</b>
8:00–9:00 a.m.	Breakfast and networking.	
9:00–9:30 a.m.	Welcome, introductions, opening remarks, review of the schedule.	Center director
9:30–10:00 a.m.	Overview of center status.	Center director
10:00–10:30 a.m.	Presentations on ongoing research (allow 15 minutes for presentations and questions, followed by 5 minutes for center partners to record their reactions).	Center investigators
10:30–10:45 a.m.	Break and networking.	
10:45–11:30 a.m.	Presentations of ongoing research (continued).	Center investigators
11:30 a.m.–12:00 p.m.	Presentations and poster sessions of ongoing research.	Center graduate students
12:00–1:00 p.m.	Lunch and networking.	
1:00–2:30 p.m.	Presentations of proposed research projects.	Center investigators
2:30–3:00 p.m.	Break and networking.	
3:00–4:00 p.m.	Presentations on proposed research projects (continued).	Center investigators
4:00–5:00 p.m.	Poster session and networking.	Center investigators
6:00–8:00 p.m.	Dinner and networking.	
<b>Day 2</b>		
8:00–9:00 a.m.	Breakfast and networking.	
9:00–10:45 a.m.	Closed session to review ongoing and proposed research projects (steering committee, evaluator, and NCI representative).	Center director
10:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m.	Business meeting.	Center director

Because important business can occur during one-on-one conversations between formal sessions, meetings should include informal time in the form of meals and breaks.

During these informal sessions, whether the director is talking to a member of the steering committee or a graduate student, effective listening is important: *Keep an open mind*: Thought is faster than

speech, making it all too easy to jump to erroneous conclusions. Try to suspend judgment until you have heard and understood everything the speaker is trying to say.

*Listen for ideas*: Do not lose your focus on listening when the speaker relates an anecdote or goes off on a tangent. If you are uncertain of the speaker's message, ask him or her to clarify the most important ideas that he or she would like you to take away from the conversation.

*Take notes*: Take notes during conversations. Include the speaker's name and a brief summary at the end of the conversation so you can follow up as needed.

### ***Reviewing Ongoing and Proposed Research***

Principal investigators of current and proposed AP4 center projects should provide 15-minute presentations of their projects during the meeting. See Appendix 8-2 of this chapter for suggested content of these presentations. For ongoing projects, investigators should prepare 1-page executive summaries of their presentations for distribution prior to the meeting, so other investigators and AP4 center partners can familiarize themselves with the progress of these projects and be prepared to offer feedback.

Graduate students could be given an opportunity to report on their research activities through posters and brief presentations. Guidelines for graduate student presentations are offered in Appendix 8-3 of this chapter. Feedback on their presentations and poster sessions should be solicited using the graduate student presentation/poster session feedback form available in Appendix 8-4 of this chapter.

As discussed in Chapter 7, each presentation of an ongoing or proposed research project should be followed by a 10-minute question-and-answer session. Center partners should then be given a few minutes to record their reactions to the project on the research project assessment form (Appendix 3-3). Copies of completed forms should be provided to the investigators, and ample opportunity should be offered during the meeting for investigators and center partners to discuss the feedback results.

Open sessions of the semiannual meeting should end with a restatement of the meeting's objectives, a synthesis of key accomplishments, and an overview of next steps. At this point, the center director should thank everyone for their participation and remind them of the dates for the next semiannual meeting.

After all projects and proposals have been presented, a closed session should be scheduled for steering committee members, the center director, the center evaluator, and the NCI representative to formally review all the center's ongoing and proposed research projects. Details on this session are provided in Chapter 7. Based on numerical ratings assigned to each project by steering committee members, the number of projects that can be supported, and funding priorities, the steering committee should select the projects to continue, end, and initiate. The center director should communicate committee decisions promptly to all investigators of ongoing and proposed AP4 center research projects.

### ***The Business Meeting***

The final session of the semiannual meeting is the business meeting. During this meeting, the steering committee and center director should discuss:

- Budget.
- Personnel, including center staff, investigators, and graduate students.
- Research status and direction.
- Proposed changes to the center policies and procedures manual (described in Chapter 6).

Business meetings should be short and simple. The center director should try to distribute information on the topics to be discussed in advance so this session can focus on decision making rather than on reporting information. The center evaluator's report should also be distributed well in advance of the semiannual meeting, so the center evaluator can make a brief presentation during the business meeting and answer any questions.

**Figure 8.3: Suggested quarterly or monthly research project report content\***

- One-paragraph synopsis of project goals and approach.
- Milestones and goals
  - Milestones, goals, and objectives planned for the reporting period and the status of each.
  - Major obstacles encountered in achieving any milestone, goal, or objective.
- Research planned
  - Milestones, goals, and objectives planned for next reporting period.
  - Unachieved objectives from previous periods.
- Research output
  - Research products and other evidence of research activity during the reporting period.
- Contacts with center partners
  - Summarize contacts with steering committee members during the reporting period.
- Financial status
  - Status and adequacy of current funding levels.
  - Project spending progress.

\*Adapted from Gray and Walters, p. 182.

### **Formal Reporting**

Principal investigators of AP4 center research projects will be required to submit brief (3 pages) monthly or quarterly reports to the center director, depending on the nature of the project, so the director is aware of their progress, accomplishments, and difficulties. In addition, principal investigators will be required to submit more detailed annual reports to the center director that will be part of the center annual report. Figures 8-3 and 8-4 give suggested formats for the principal investigators' reports.

**Figure 8-4: Suggested annual research project report content\***

- Long-term goals:
  - Original long-term goals.
  - Changes in long-term goals.
- Background for long-term goals:
  - Why the problem is important.
  - Problem's relevance to the center mission.
  - Problem's relevance to the interests of center partners.
  - Innovation of the current approach.
  - Relationships with other center projects.
- Intermediate-term objectives:
  - Original stages for the current year.
  - Changes in the staging of current activities.
- Schedule of major steps (can be presented in the text and in a chart):
  - Concrete steps to achieve yearly objectives, with dates and major milestones.
  - Include milestones planned and those actually achieved.
- Major concerns:
  - Major concerns related to the research.
- Budget:
  - Planned and actual direct costs required to perform the research (include all budget categories).
- Staffing:
  - Planned and actual investigators participating in the research and their roles.
- Deliverables:
  - Planned and actual deliverables of the project, including reports, patents, and publications.

\*Adapted from Gray and Walters, pp. 183–4.

Formal annual reports to the NCI, prepared by the AP4 center director with input from the center evaluator (discussed in Chapter 9) and project principal investigators, must be filed according to a well-established schedule. This requires compiling data on a continual basis and allowing plenty of time to complete annual reports to the NCI.

**Figure 8-5: Suggested annual center report content**

- Overview of center vision, mission, goals, and objectives:
  - Original objectives and milestones for the reporting period.
  - Status of these objectives and milestones.
  - Reasons for deviations from plans.
- Description of center activities (planned and actual):
  - Research projects initiated.
  - New partners.
  - New staff.
  - Meetings.
  - Interactions with current and potential partners.
  - Communications (press releases, brochures, etc.).
- Results of center activities (planned and actual):
  - Interim and final research results.
  - Deliverables from research projects.
  - Publications and patents from research projects.
  - Funds received.
- Plans for next reporting period:
  - Research projects to continue, end, or start.
  - Deliverables from research projects.
  - Publications and patents to be produced by research projects.
  - New sources of funds.
- Budget (compare planned to actual budget):
  - Explain differences between planned and actual income and expenditures.
- Appendices:
  - Reports on center-sponsored research projects.
  - Evaluator's annual report.
  - Publications resulting from center projects.
  - Communications materials (e.g., press releases, newsletters, brochures).

## **Internal Communications**

Successful AP4 centers must conduct truly interdisciplinary research, in spite of the usual autonomy and competition of institutional departments. The AP4 center culture must therefore emphasize that ideas from all departments and individuals

associated with the center are valued. Communication techniques for ensuring that all ideas submitted to the center are considered seriously include:

- Brainstorming (ideas are generated instead of evaluated, and building on the ideas of others and original thinking are encouraged).
- Seminars.
- Coauthored papers.
- Guest lectures in other departments.
- Shared responsibilities for committees.
- Assigning graduate students from different disciplines to a research project.

Internal communication vehicles may also include:

- Talks at partner organizations.
- Site visits.
- Visits by steering committee members to the AP4 center home.
- Poster sessions.

The center director should be in regular communication with all steering committee members, keep records of formal and informal communications, and respond to queries appropriately to avoid the need for more time-consuming communications.

Ensuring that internal communications are consistent, continuous, and involve all those affiliated with the AP4 center will ensure that center research is truly cooperative.

## External Communications

**Figure 8-6: Suggested newsletter contents\***

Basic information:

- Center name, address, telephone number, e-mail address.
- Name and logo of host institution.
- Mention that the center is sponsored by the NCI and partners (list each partner).
- List of center investigators, students, and staff.

News:

- Information on center publications and how to obtain them.
- Brief summaries of center research projects.
- Articles on recent scientific developments by center investigators.
- Invited articles by steering committee members and their colleagues.
- Lists of recent publications and patents.
- Calendar of center events, including professional meetings and conference notices.
- Recent activities of center investigators and students.
- Announcements about new center partners and staff.
- Special center educational programs and workshops.
- Messages from the center director.

\*Adapted from Gray and Walters, p. 164.

External communication  
s include:

- Administrative reporting to the AP4 center host institution.
- Newsletters.
- Press releases.
- Videos.
- Public outreach.

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- AP4 page on the NCI Developmental Therapeutics Program (DTP) website.

The center newsletter keeps investigators, partners, and staff informed of the progress of center research and activities. Steering committee members can easily circulate it to colleagues. The newsletter also provides concise measurements of research accomplishments and center activities that might not be communicated any other way. It can be used to promote the center to potential partners, the university, and the general public. It can also enhance the sense of being part of the center for investigators, students, and staff who might not otherwise be aware of center happenings. The newsletter, in electronic and/or print form, can be produced semiannually or quarterly, depending on center needs and resources and the document's contents and length.

In determining whether to publish a newsletter, the center director should consider the following:

- Will the benefits of publishing a regular newsletter outweigh the financial costs and effort required?
- Will the newsletter duplicate other efforts?
- Will enough information and articles be available for a regularly published newsletter?

The center director should call on the host institution's public relations staff to help communicate the center message to the public. These professionals can help write press releases and stories,



produce videos, and develop informational brochures. They also have the contacts needed to ensure that information on the center is communicated to local media outlets. But it is up to the center director to determine the message to be communicated.

As AP4 centers are being established, external communications will most likely be low on the priority action list of the center director. For this reason, DTP will maintain a page on its website to communicate information about each AP4 center—its director, institution, partners, main research areas, abstracts of active projects, and news.

**Figure 8.7: Center brochure contents\***

- Center name, logo, host institution, and location.
- Identify center as an NCI-sponsored program.
- Purpose—goals and objectives.
- Center operations.
- Scope of research.
- Director's name.
- List of investigators involved in the center, including their areas of expertise.
- Information on the host institution.
- Benefits of becoming a center partner.
- Contact information: address, telephone, fax, e-mail, and website.

\*Adapted from Gray and Walters, p. 185.

## **Conclusion**

Without clear communications, messages will be misinterpreted or not received at all, and center operations will suffer. But many potential problems that an AP4 center might face can be averted through successful communication,

which requires careful planning and continuous attention.

## **References**

Gray D.O., Walters S.G. (1998). *Managing the Industry/University Cooperative Research Center: A Guide for Directors and Other Stakeholders*. Columbus, OH: Battelle Press.

## **Appendix 8-1: Master Communications Calendar\***

### ***Month 1***

- NCI meeting for AP4 center directors and evaluators.
- Develop agenda and director's report for first semiannual meeting.
- Distribute new research ideas from steering committee to investigators.
- Make arrangements for first semiannual meeting, such as identifying meeting space and ordering meals.
- Center budget review.

### ***Month 2***

- Investigators prepare research reports for semiannual meeting.
- Investigators prepare quarterly reports.
- Investigators prepare proposals for new research projects.
- Prepare newsletter.
- Advise AP4 center host institution of the upcoming semiannual meeting.
- Center budget review.

### ***Month 3***

- Send new research proposals, research reports, and minutes of most recent meeting to steering committee.
- Send first meeting agenda to all participants.
- Meet with center students about presentations and poster sessions at first semiannual meeting.
- Partners prepare for first semiannual meeting.
- Center budget review.

### ***Month 4***

- Hold semiannual meeting.
- Distribute center newsletter.
- Center budget review.

### ***Month 5***

- Visits to current and potential partners.
- Investigators prepare quarterly reports.
- Write draft minutes of first semiannual meeting.
- Center budget review.

### ***Month 6***

- Finalize minutes of first semiannual meeting.
- Visits to current and potential partners.
- Center budget review.

### ***Month 7***

- Visits to current and potential partners.
- Make arrangements for second semiannual meeting, such as identifying meeting space and ordering meals.
- Develop agenda and director's report for second semiannual meeting.
- Evaluator's report to director.
- Center budget review.

### ***Month 8***

- Investigators prepare research reports for semiannual meeting.
- Investigators prepare quarterly reports.
- Investigators prepare proposals for new research projects.
- Prepare newsletter.
- Prepare annual report to NCI.
- Advise AP4 center host institution of upcoming semiannual meeting.
- Center budget review.

### ***Month 9***

- Send new research proposals, research reports, and minutes of first meeting to steering committee.
- Investigators prepare annual research project reports.
- Send second meeting agenda to all participants.
- Meet with center students about plans, presentations, and poster sessions for second semiannual meeting.
- Partners prepare for second semiannual meeting.
- Center budget review.

### ***Month 10***

- Hold semiannual meeting.
- Distribute center newsletter.
- Center budget review.

### ***Month 11***

- Write NCI grant renewal application.
- Submit center annual report to NCI.
- Investigators prepare quarterly reports.
- Write draft minutes of second semiannual meeting.
- Center budget review.

### ***Month 12***

- Deadline for new research ideas from partners.
- Finalize minutes from second semiannual meeting.
- Submit renewal application to NCI.
- Center budget review.

\*Adapted from Gray and Walters, pp. 167–8.

## **Appendix 8-2: Suggested Content for Research Project Presentations\***

Principal investigator:

Research associates:

Presentation goals:

- Highlight accomplishments.
- Generate relevant questions.
- Increase understanding.
- Provide an interesting presentation.

Technical basis of project:

Accomplishments:

- Research laboratory established.
- Graduate students recruited.
- Equipment and materials ordered.
- Experiments completed.
- Initial results.
- Deliverables produced (including reports to center director and steering committee, publications, patents).

Recent results:

- Graphs.
- Charts.
- Pictures.
- Data.

Implications of results:

- Possible applications.
- Impact on the field.

Future of project:

- Short-term plans and ideas.
- Long-term plans and ideas.

\*Adapted from Gray and Walters, p. 175.

### **Appendix 8-3: Presentation Guidelines for Graduate Students\***

When you make a presentation about your research, you are also presenting and selling yourself. This is good practice for the future; the contacts you make through your presentation may be very valuable.

1. Outline your talk with guidance from your faculty advisor. In your talk and on your slides, include:
  - Your name and your advisor's name.
  - Title of the research.
  - Goals and objectives.
  - Relevance to center partner organizations and to center goals.
  - Progress to date or since the last presentation.
  - Plans for the future.
  - Acknowledgements, such as of the AP4 center for supporting your work, and investigators or steering committee members for assistance or materials.

Be sure to complete your talk within the time allocated. Allow time for questions.

2. Prepare slides:
  - Keep phrases short and to the point.
  - Minimize the use of complicated formulas.
  - Check the sharpness and readability of the slides from where the audience will sit.
  - Even though everyone else does it, do not include critical slides that are illegible.
  - Provide copies of your slides for distribution to the audience before you begin your talk or in advance of the meeting.
3. Rehearsal and presentation:
  - Complete a dry run in the actual setting, if possible.
  - Rehearse in front of professors/peers.
  - Use a pointer with your slides.
  - Do not stand between the audience and the projection screen.
  - Dress professionally.
4. Question-and-answer sessions:

Questions and answers are important for your research and your development as a scientist. If possible, ask another student to take notes on the questions for your future reference.

  - Have research notebooks available for reference.
  - Have someone take notes and write down who asked the questions.
  - Ask for business cards for future reference.
5. Debriefing:
  - Meet with your faculty advisor to review the results and plan for the future.
  - Obtain feedback and notes from your student partner.

- Obtain copies of completed graduate student presentation/poster session feedback forms.

\*Adapted from Gray and Walters, pp. 173–4.

#### **Appendix 8-4: Graduate Student Presentation/Poster Session Feedback Form\***

To be used by center director, investigators, steering committee members, and students.

Project ID number:

Title:

Researcher name:

Advisor:

Date:

Research goals and objectives presented? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Relevance shown to center partners or long-term center goals? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Comment: \_\_\_\_\_

Progress to date or since last time discussed? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Difficulties encountered mentioned? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ Not applicable \_\_\_\_\_

Comment: \_\_\_\_\_

Results presented? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Plans for the future mentioned? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Questions/suggestions/comments about the research:

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Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Organization: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail address: \_\_\_\_\_

\*Adapted from Gray and Walters, p. 176.